

House Chair Kelly Breen

House Bills 4138-4148

My name is Jamie Bisson and I have a daughter that is a freshman at Michigan State University. I am writing today representing my daughter. I am for parts of these bills and uncertain on other parts. I am concerned that your efforts only concentrate on the gun issues that plague our country. I feel that the events of February 13 are a culmination of many issues. I am here to speak on two of them; gun control and mental health.

My daughter had class in Berkey Hall on Monday, February 13, 2023. Her professor let them out early, so she and her classmates decided to go grab dinner before returning to Berkey to complete more work. Upon arriving back to Berkey they headed up the stairwell and as soon as they reached the 3rd floor, they heard gun shots. They rushed into room 307 and barricaded themselves in. They would be there for roughly 3 hours, until SWAT entered their room and ushered them to safety, making sure to avoid room 114. Hours earlier in room 114, a classroom full of students and a professor, was breached and a gunman opened fire. Seven students were hit and many more rushed to find safety, but were unable to. Their only option was to start breaking windows and jump to the ground below. As this was happening the Professor that was lecturing at the front of the class decided to put all of his weight on the front door, as he was concerned that when the gunman left the back door he may be heading to the front. Can you see the classroom? Can you see the chaos? Can you see the fear in their eyes? I hope as you continue to write bills in the safety of your offices, you will see the classroom and fear that this event, and many others, represent.

My first concern on passing more gun control laws is that, if passed, will not be upheld to the letter of that law. The gunman above was charged with felony gun possession, but was able to plead this down to a misdemeanor. I am not opposed to this option of our legal system, but feel that if a felony gun charge is brought forth against a person, whether they plead not guilty and take their chances or plead guilty and take a lesser charge, Michigan Penal Code section 750.224(f) should still apply in either of these scenarios. Pleading to a misdemeanor will allow them to avoid a felony on their record which will certainly help with employment opportunities in the future, but they should still have to follow the possession rules that state they cannot possess, use, transport, sell, or purchase a firearm or ammunition in Michigan until 5 years after completing all sentences, parole or probation, and all fees and fines paid. This step may have prevented the events of February 13, while allowing the charged to still plea to a misdemeanor.

My second concern with gun control Senate Bills are that too many issues are placed in to the bills. If there is bipartisan support for a certain gun control measure, put that, and only that, in the bill. Don't try to sneak other issues in that will eliminate some or all of the bipartisan support. I know there are many sensible gun control measures that continuously gain bipartisan support on a state and/or federal level that don't pass because of last minute interjections by one or both parties to try to appease special interest groups. Instead of trying to gain credit for, or appealing to special interests, please remember the fear that was in the eyes of those students in room 114 on February 13, and write bills for them.

Mental Health is a big issue in the State of Michigan and across the country. I have been researching this and find limited information that can be helpful to those looking to help themselves or a loved one. Some of us are fortunate enough to have the resources to help our loved ones with counseling and

mental health services. Many others do not have this luxury. In researching the Protecting Access to Medicare Act of 2014, specifically Section 223, I learned that Michigan's Department of Health and Human Services requested to become a demonstration state in 2016 under Section 223. Section 223 of the Act provides for the creation and evaluation of a demonstration program to improve community mental health services. Finally on August 5, 2020 Michigan's request was approved. The two year long demonstration began on October 1, 2021 and at the end of the two years MDHHS will evaluate the programs impact and assess the potential to continue or expand the initiative. Are any of our representatives monitoring this program or looking to enact other mental health initiatives in the State of Michigan? How do we help a father with a 43-year-old son that is "evil angry" get the resources or information he needs to help his son? Do we have programs in place? If so, where is the information so loved ones can find it? If not, why are we waiting on demonstration programs and not initiating our own? In my opinion this is just as important a step as gun control measures. Can we please look into this further, and introduce bills in unison with gun control measures.

The last issue is also a mental health issue, but looking specifically at the trauma inflicted during events like February 13. Michigan State University is doing an amazing job in offering resources for those that need it. Those resources will continue for the foreseeable future, but eventually the Winter Semester will end, and these students and professors will leave campus, leaving behind those resources they so desperately need. What happens when these students go home and their parents don't have the resources or information needed to continue to treat the trauma their children are having to deal with? Are we creating a viscous circle of mental health issues in our state and country? I am looking for one of you to introduce and sponsor a bill to help the victims of school shootings to deal with their trauma, many of whom do not have the resources available, by providing counseling options to them. I feel it is the least we can do as we continue to ignore the issue and allow these events to occur over and over again. While you sit at the safety of your desks, please remember the image of that classroom and the fear in their eyes, and do something to help our children.

The events of February 13 on the MSU campus destroyed lives of innocent students and their families. I am upset with myself for not seeing the absolute devastation that these events cause, not only to those that lose a loved one, but those that have to try to move on after such a traumatic event. I do not have the platform to effect change, but you all do. I am asking that you come together, not as republican or democrat, but as parents, brothers and sisters, or even decent human beings, to put together some bipartisan bills that will effect change. The time for this to happen has long since passed, and inaction is no longer acceptable now that you have the vision of the fear in the eyes of those students in room 114.

I would like to thank this committee for allowing me to submit written testimony on the events of February 13 and the subsequent bills of February 16. I look forward to seeing the actions you will take to help keep our children safe.

Sincerely,

Jamie Bisson
704-492-1391
Jbisson24@gmail.com